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ABSTRACT

A research project explored the potential of collegial coaching and reflective dialogue as mechanisms for school leaders to use to significantly alter the organizational context so that cultural change might occur. The study investigated the possibility that collegial coaching, reflection, and dialogue about teaching practices may provide an environment conducive to meaningful change. The research design was ethnographic and qualitative in nature. Data were collected within a naturalistic setting with participant observation playing a major role. Participants were a principal, who served also as a researcher, six teachers paired into three collegial coaching teams, and an administrative peer, who assumed the role of impartial observer and interviewer. The setting was a middle school with a 390-student population in grades 4 through 7, located in a rapidly growing area of a midwestern state that is becoming increasingly suburban. Initially, teacher participants received training in collegial coaching, dialoguing, and written and oral reflection. Three data sources were used to determine the effects of collegial coaching in combination with reflection on participant teachers' classroom practices and about their attitudes and perceptions toward professional growth. Data were analyzed using constant comparison techniques. At the conclusion of the study, formal analyses of data resulted in development of a case report. Dialogue among the participants of the coaching teams and the principal provided insight into how their interactions impacted the culture of this middle school. This case illustrates how the collegial coaching process could be used as an alternative supervisory strategy to the more traditional methods used. In order to create meaningful change, individuals must develop an understanding of their theories-in-use and their espoused theories. Contains 23 references. (BT)

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Using Collegial Coaching and Reflection as Mechanisms for Changing School Cultures

Authors: Judith C. Delany and Daisy E. Arredondo

Introduction

Research about the effects of school reform efforts has for some time documented numerous failures to bring about comprehensive, meaningful change (c.f., Hargreaves & Dawe, 1990, Hirsch & Ponder, 1991, Fuchs & Fuchs, 1995, and Fullan, 1993). While more recent research has shown that reform strategies aimed at changing the core technology of schools -- i.e. the teaching and learning process -- show promise in affecting the quality of student learning (c.f., Joyce & Calhoun, 1998, Newmann, King & Rigdon, 1997, and Prestine & McGreal, 1997), it seems clear that permanent changes in school practices will be realized only when the professional practices of teachers and administrators have been transformed into and/or by new school cultures. *Reculturing* is a term referring to the process of establishing an organizational environment that is conducive to or receptive of change. In the past, external consultants have been viewed as the "real professionals" fixing needy educational institutions. Hirsh and Ponder (1991) warned that school restructuring and reculturing can only be successful when teachers are viewed as professionals and actively participate in professional growth or change process.

Hargreaves and Dawe (1990) attributed the persistent failure of educational change efforts at the classroom level to school cultures that foster isolation of the classroom teacher. They argued that teachers must be released from this isolation and allowed to build collegial relationships as a means of developing a responsive, professional culture which might be receptive to, and supportive of, meaningful change. In this study, a process of collegial coaching -- coupled with reflection and dialogue (Arredondo, Brody, & Zimmerman, 1995) -- was directed toward the context of teaching. Collegial coaching is usually described as a type of peer coaching, often directed toward the context of teaching and utilizing processes for self-reflection and professional dialoguing needed to improve

teaching practices and/or to alter the organizational context. Osterman (1990) described reflection as "concentration and careful consideration" and reflective practice as "mindful consideration on one's actions, specifically one's professional actions," p. 134. In this research project, the underlying intent was to explore the potential of collegial coaching and reflective dialogue as mechanisms that school leaders might use to significantly alter the organizational context so that cultural change might occur.

Purpose and Research Question

Researchers in this study investigated the possibility that collegial coaching, reflection and dialogue about teaching practices may provide an environment conducive to meaningful change. Three major assumptions provided underpinning for the research: 1. Changes in teachers' practices may be evident when they become aware of incongruencies between their espoused theories and their theories-in-use (Schon, 1987; Osterman, 1990; Argyris, 1993). Collegial coaching, dialogue, and reflection may result in teachers acquiring positive attitudes and perceptions about ongoing professional growth. 3. Cultural change may occur in the school as teachers work collaboratively utilizing collegial coaching, dialogue and reflective practice (Osterman, 1990; Osterman & Kottkamp, 1993). Hence, the major research question was: How do collegial coaching, reflection, and dialogue affect teacher practices, teachers' attitudes and perceptions about professional growth, and thus, eventually, school culture?

Study Design and Methods

The research design employed in this study was ethnographic and qualitative in nature. Data were collected within a naturalistic setting with participant observation playing a major role. The tentative, preliminary premise that collegial coaching coupled with reflection and dialogue may lead to significant changes in a school culture guided initial data collection strategies. Due to the nature of the study, however, the design unfolded as the research progressed. Participants in the study were a principal, six teachers paired into three collegial coaching teams, and an administrative peer, who assumed the role of

impartial observer and interviewer. The setting was a middle school with a 390-student population in grades four through seven. The school is located in a school district in a rapidly growing area of a mid-western state that is becoming increasingly suburban. The principal served dual roles as participant and researcher.

Participants in this study used a specific format for collegial coaching in which dialogue patterns are used to facilitate both written and oral reflection about teaching practices. This format for collegial coaching is part of a constructivist supervisory model that includes strategies for engaging in reflective conversations that both support and challenge collegial thinking, dialogue skills such as pausing, paraphrasing, and probing, and development of knowledge about the ways in which intraschool dialogue reflects, maintains, and can be used to change school cultures (Arredondo, Brody, Zimmerman, & Moffett, 1995; Arredondo, Brody, & Zimmerman, 1995; Pearce & Arredondo, 1996; Arredondo & Rucinski, 1998; and Arredondo, 1998). The research reported here examined the effects of principal and teacher use of the components of this supervisory model within the context of one middle school.

Teacher participants were provided training on collegial coaching, dialoguing, and written/oral reflection prior to the study. Data collection and analyses were ongoing for an intensive four-week period during the Spring of 1995. Follow-up data were collected during the Fall of 1995. During the intervention period, the teacher participants and the principal gathered data jointly from multiple sources and in a variety of formats. For example, baseline data included two thirty minute videotapes of each teacher engaged in usual classroom instruction, teachers' journal entries about recent episodes of instruction, and a written narrative description about each teacher's performance developed by the principal.

Three data sources were used to determine the effects of collegial coaching in combination with reflection on participant teachers' classroom practices and about their attitudes and perceptions toward professional growth. Interview questions and reflective

journal prompts were designed to assist the researcher in discovering insights that teachers may have gleaned from reflection, and to determine how these insights may have impacted teachers' solving of problems that had been uncovered during their reflective conversations about their teaching practices. Insights about teacher development of educative theory and about institutional or cultural change were also sought. Videotapes of teaching and of pre- and post observation conferences, journals, and interviews were used to collect data. A major purpose of videotaping was to provide teacher participants with immediate feedback about their use of the dialogue skills of pausing, paraphrasing, and probing during planning and reflective conferences. The elements of dialogue and their effects on teacher/coach thinking quite naturally became a focus for reflection as the skills developed. An administrative peer from a neighboring district, served as an unbiased observer and interviewer, and in this role, collected both interview and observational data, which allowed triangulation of data sources during the analyses.

Data were analyzed using constant comparison techniques. Analyses were open-ended and inductive leading to a maximal understanding of the phenomena being studied within the school context. During analyses, the data were organized into a case report which included an explication of the problem, a thorough description of the context and setting, a description of the elements identified as important and studied in depth, and a presentation and discussion of the outcomes of the inquiry. Credibility was demonstrated through triangulation of multiple data sources and methods, and transferability was enhanced by the provision of a baseline of data, which established the context of the study. At the conclusion of the study, the formal analyses of data resulted in development of the case report.

Results and Discussion

Even though data collection occurred during the fourth quarter of the school year -- a time that is generally not perceived as optimum because of the increased "end-of-year" pressures teachers may feel -- and the data collection period was relatively brief, several

important inferences can be drawn from the rich data reported in the case analysis. First, findings support the assumptions and observations of others (cf. Schon, 1987; Argyris, 1993; and Osterman, 1990) that changes may be evident in teachers' practices when they become aware of incongruencies between their espoused theories and their theories-in-use. Examples from two teachers, Leah and Elizabeth, clearly document such changes.

The journal entries, videotapes of conferences, and interviews collected during the study, when compared to the initial baseline data, revealed that teachers said they made changes in their instructional practices as a result of the collegial coaching and reflective practice. Thus teachers demonstrated that they felt a need to align their espoused theories with their theories-in-use. This often occurred when they discovered that their theories-in-use did not reflect their espoused theories and, subsequently they became dissatisfied with the resulting student performance. First, Leah's case: In her videotaped segment of "usual teaching," the lesson was quite teacher-directed with a lecture discussion format followed by teacher guided activities. She appeared to control the direction of the lesson while being the center of the learning process. Leah implemented structured textbook-driven lessons with predetermined learning objectives. In her initial journal entry, she wrote that she felt good about this recent segment of instruction she was asked to reflect on prior to the beginning of the study.

During the first week of data collection, however, Leah appeared to think more carefully about how and what she was doing. She wrote in her journal that, "the lesson went really well. . .[although] I did notice that many of the students were having trouble getting organized. I really think teaching the students the dynamics of cooperative learning would be a thing to incorporate." During the third week of the study in the pre-conference, Leah described the lesson she was going to teach which again relied heavily on the teacher's textbook and related ditto sheets to address the objective of the lesson. In the reflective post conference, Leah stated that she did not think the students grasped the concepts. For example, at one point, she added, "You can't rely on the textbook alone."

Following the post conference, Leah wrote in her journal, "Through our dialoguing, I was able to reflect [on student learning during the lesson] and come up with the idea of having students classify minerals before exposing them to the textbook materials."

Thus, when Leah reflected on incongruencies between her espoused theories and theories-in-use with a collegial coaching partner, she thought about her frustration with the students' performances which had been surfaced during the conference. Consequently she changed her instructional methods. For example, her final lesson objective was for the students to write a descriptive paragraph about a dinosaur of their choice. After the lesson, Leah wrote in her journal about the feelings of frustration about students' performances. During the post conferencing with her coaching partner, Elizabeth, Leah complained that the students were not making connections. Elizabeth paraphrased:

> They seem to be very concrete, and you want to help them. Maybe what I'm hearing is the expectation of the students doesn't meet yours? You want to be a facilitator of learning. Do you have an idea of how to get your expectations and theirs to be closer together?

Leah replied that she should be a "guider." [sic] Subsequently, in her journal entry, Leah wrote that as a result of dialoguing with her partner and observing in her classroom [Elizabeth's], she was exploring different instructional methods and planning on developing a "sense of 'a learning community' in her classroom similar to that in Elizabeth's classroom."

Elizabeth's case provided a second example of change in instructional practice made to align espoused theories with theories-in-use. From baseline data, it appeared that Elizabeth was more facilitative in her teaching style. For example, her videotapes show that she seldom used lecture to transmit information; she structured lessons that allowed students to arrive at their own conclusions; and, in interactive discussion, she validated student responses. In post-conferencing the first week, Elizabeth stated her philosophy in response to a question about students having a choice about what they learn. "My major goal is for them to desire learning. I want to be a facilitator. . ."

However, journal entries and dialoguing videotapes revealed that Elizabeth often felt concerned about her students' performances. In one early entry following a math lesson, she wrote:

> I then asked a student who had the correct answer to explain the method used to achieve the answer. This turned into a frustrating part [of the lesson] because this student assumed he knew the procedure and did not read the information.

During the second week of the study, Elizabeth responded to a collegial coaching partner's question, "How did it go?" with more visible concern. The lesson for observation was for nonstandard word problems. "I felt frustrated", she said. "They weren't getting it. . .I need to make math teaching into more problem-solving situations. . .Put them [students] into situations where they will have to use more language. . ." And, following the post-conference, she journaled: "I'm not giving up, but it does become a challenge to find another way to present the concepts that will make sense to them."

Elizabeth, who had been frustrated with her previous lesson because the students were so confused, did some detailed problem solving during her third week post-conference. Her observed lesson was an integrated one with spelling and language arts. During the videotaped post-conference about the lesson, her collegial coaching partner asked her about the lesson.

> I think it was a lot for them to handle. . . .I'd spend more time on the spelling aspect of it, then expand to the word detective activity. Being this late in the year, it frustrates me that, as a teacher, I made this judgment [having too much in the lesson].

In response to her partner's probing, Elizabeth later wrote: "I also was made aware by the probing of my partner that I need to really analyze my lesson thoroughly when I plan to present new concepts to my students."

During the interviews at the end of the four-week data collection, each teacher participant reported that collegial coaching and reflection impacted her teaching practices. The overwhelming consensus was that an awareness of the "how, what and why" of teaching that had not been there previously had developed. Elizabeth sums up: "It all goes

back to set. I tried to pay more attention to that. [I kept thinking] that I would like to see me be less verbal and let the students reflect on their own."

A second inference or assumption supported by this study is that reflective practice and collegial coaching may result in teachers acquiring positive attitudes and perceptions about professional growth activities. Teachers' journal entries and interviews supported reflective practice and collegial coaching as valuable professional development tools. The teachers' oral and written comments reflected four major categories of benefits teachers perceived as resulting from their reflection and collegial coaching. These were: (1) helping teachers to learn from others in a non-threatening environment; (2) providing motivation and enthusiasm; (3) forcing reflection about instructional practices and hence professional growth; and (4) creating an increased awareness of the "how, why, and what" of good teaching practices. Direct evidence supporting these assertions are readily found in the data sources. For example, one relatively inexperienced teacher wrote:

> Peer [collegial] coaching and dialoguing fit right in with the philosophy of my college on teaching which is that a teacher should be a reflective decision maker. This idea had been rather vague to me until now. I have found in doing this program that the conferences have helped me to think about my teaching strategies.

Another stated: "Other teachers are our best resources. Their ideas get you to thinking [reflecting] about things [issues dealing with instruction] . . . It makes you refreshed." Teachers involved in this study overwhelmingly reported that they had grown professionally, and that [they] believed that collegial coaching and reflective practice as used in this study impacted in a positive way [their] attitudes and beliefs about professional growth. Osterman (1993) acknowledged that the articulation of craft knowledge enhances professional growth and development by facilitating dialogue among practitioners. This process of sharing experiences increases reflection and opportunities for communication and collaboration. Among others, Joyce and Showers (1992), Osterman and Kottkamp (1993), Hillkirk and Noland (1991), and Resnick and Klopfer (1989) have all suggested that learning is more effective when the learner is actively involved in the process, when it

takes place as a collaborative rather than isolated activity, and when it takes place within a relevant context. These conditions were all present for the teachers involved in this study.

A third inference and/or assumption supported by this study is that collegial coaching and reflection may lead to changes in the school culture. For example, during the study, it appeared that teachers began to trust one another through the process of collegial coaching and reflection. Through the dialogue and conferencing sessions, they were empowered to express their true concerns, to reflect on their practices and the resultant performance of their students, and to take more risks. After the second observation and dialoguing session, Leah wrote, "Probing has given me the opportunity to think in more diverse ways. I'm thinking about higher levels of learning and how to incorporate them into my teaching." By the third week of the study, each teacher reported implementing or planning to implement at least one change in her teaching. This sense of awareness changed the school environment. The journal entries throughout the study reflect this change. For example, a teacher stated, "McGillicutty's questions keep going through my head . . . 'If you teach something, there should be a reason.'" Another wrote:

> The pausing, probing, and paraphrasing does make an impact on what I think about my teaching. It really makes you think about every aspect of what happens in the lesson, how students respond, and how I respond. When you take the time to think about what took place, it gives you insight as to what could be done differently and what could be added to make the lesson even better.

During the project, excitement about teaching seemed palpable and contagious. And, consistent with what Arredondo et al (1995) have reported, as teachers became increasingly aware of their own use of language and more comfortable with skills such as active listening and framing dialogue questions, they reported renewed enthusiasm for their craft. "I wouldn't have made time to reflect on my own. It [the dialogue] caused in-depth reflection. In the rush of teaching, I don't take time to reflect . . . This encourages you to sit down and talk with someone and not go back to your room and into your own little world. You get ideas or get reassured that you're doing okay." "You're always thinking

about what you are doing. . .wondering how to make it better. The videotape is such a vivid journal [for dialogue]."

Broader cultural change was also apparent in the school as teachers outside the project collaborated. Teachers reported that reflection with a peer created enthusiasm for their professional growth. The talk about teaching appeared to create heightened interest in more professional conversations about teaching and led to implementation of several changes in teaching practices among other teachers in the school. The principal described this effect as "snowballing" and agreed with Hirsh and Ponder's (1991) conclusion that school restructuring is most successful when teachers are active participants in their own professional growth. Teachers involved in systematic inquiry into their own classroom teaching and into their own learning "are experiencing professional growth in the real world," she said. "They are engaged in experimentation for the sake of improvement itself."

The principal/ researcher in this study was keenly aware of the time constraints for her and the staff members involved. To facilitate the involvement of busy teachers, she conducted the inservice training on collegial coaching, dialoguing, and written/ oral reflection prior to the collection of baseline data at times most convenient for the teacher participants. This inservice was offered during the planning times of participants, before school, or after school. Her journal reflects this ongoing concern over time.

> Again, I offered to cover their classrooms as needed to provide time for collaboration. I stress tot hem that I did not want the study to intrude on their planning time, and that I would be willing to work with them as needed.

Researchers were aware that at least some of the reported effects of the use of collegial coaching, reflection, and dialogue may have been attributable to participation in the research project. They were also aware that reported changes might be short-lived or highly transitional in nature. To more deeply explore the nature of the reported changes, the principal researcher (who had accepted a position in another district) conducted interviews with the teacher participants after the beginning of the school year following the

intervention. During those interviews, it became clear that while she had been successful in using collegial coaching, reflection, and dialogue as mechanisms to initiate changes in the school's culture, the changes were both fragile and dependent on her presence and leadership actions. For example, in the follow-up interviews, teachers were asked if they were currently engaged in dialoguing, journaling, or conferencing with other teachers. Several stated that while they had grown professionally and thought collegial coaching and reflection were valuable, they did not have "the personal discipline" or "time to continue those actions on my own." One teacher summed it up: "If the principal said, 'Let's do it,' I'd do it. The more you did it [dialoging and journaling], the more it would cross over into your classroom. It needs to continue [but the new principal hasn't encouraged it."]

Raywid (1993) raised the concern that finding collaborative time for teachers to reflect together on their practice may be more important to sustaining school improvement than either equipment or facilities. This concern has been supported in more recent studies of school reform. For example, from interviews with school principals supportive of reform efforts, Arredondo and Rucinski (1998b) found that creative scheduling "to free up teachers for collaborative planning" was one of the most frequently cited ways that principals supported implementation of interdisciplinary curriculum reform. And, in a recent review of successfully restructured schools, Joyce and Calhoun (1998) reported that scheduling time for teacher-to-teacher dialogue was a key factor present in all the restructuring projects they judged to be successful.

Conclusion

This study presents the interactions among three coaching teams and the principal, and provides considerable insight into how these interactions impacted the culture of the middle school in this study. This case illustrates how the collegial coaching process could be used as an alternative supervisory strategy to the more traditional methods used in the state in which this school is located. Other research (Fullan, 1991; Fullan, 1993) has indicated that school leaders might more profitably direct their energies toward creation of

cultures that facilitate changed professional practices. This study adds strength to those findings and suggests that one way to 'reculture and restructure' a school is to release teachers from the isolation of their classrooms and to build a collaborative culture through use of collegial coaching, reflection and dialogue.

Through the inspection of emergent themes within this case report, a major implication for organizational reform surfaced: To create meaningful change, individuals must develop an understanding of their theories-in-use and their espoused theories. When reflecting on practices that are incongruent with their beliefs, individuals develop a level of awareness of unacceptable practices and a concern for outcomes that result in frustration with what they see and in motivation to change those outcomes. Collegial coaching, dialogue and reflection enabled the teachers in this study to become analytical, reflective, and self-directed in their professional development. Their assumption of control over and inquiry into their own professional practices created excitement about and an awareness of the "what, why and how" of teaching. This excitement "snowballed" into the beginnings of cultural change, which is reflected in the videotaped comment of one of the project participants, "to create a community of learners and sustain meaningful change, school leaders should encourage collaborative reflection on professional practices." Osterman (1990) emphasized the belief that individuals are the key components in organizational change, and reflective practice challenges educators to be personally and actively involved in restructuring institutions of learning. If educators are to participate in the change process, however, schools must establish learning environments in which those educators can develop and utilize habits of reflection and agency, personal causality that enables individuals to participate in the change process.

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